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Viewing cable 06CAIRO4382, NEA ASSISTANT SECRETARY DAVID WELCH AND DNSA

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06CAIRO4382	2006-07-16 07:42	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Cairo

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CAIRO 004382

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/12/2016

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [EAID](#) [MOPS](#) [KPAL](#) [EG](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: NEA ASSISTANT SECRETARY DAVID WELCH AND DNSA
ABRAMS' JULY 11-12 CAIRO MEETINGS

Classified by Ambassador Francis Ricciardone for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) During a July 11-12 visit to Cairo, NEA Assistant Secretary Welch and Deputy National Security Advisor Elliott

SIPDIS

Abrams along with the Ambassador met separately with Egyptian Intelligence Chief Omar Soliman (sep channel), Foreign Minister Aboul Gheit, Arab League Secretary General Amre Moussa, and a group of Egyptian civil society activists. Aboul Gheit discussed details of planned Strategic Dialogue meetings in Washington July 18 (septel), the situation in Gaza, and other regional issues. Aboul Gheit requested USG assistance in opening the Rafah/Gaza border to permit stranded Palestinians to return to Gaza, recommended working with Turkey as a conduit to Syria, and agreed that Hamas should not benefit from the current regional crisis. Aboul Gheit proposed that Israel "forget the soldier (Shalit) for a while," in order to de-escalate the crisis and diminish the role of Hamas leader Khaled Misha'al. On Iraq, Aboul Gheit said the GOE was devising a strategy to jump-start relations with Baghdad, "short of sending an Egyptian Ambassador to Baghdad." Aboul Gheit warned against allowing Iran to play a role in "regional security arrangements," as a result of P5/Germany nuclear talks. Aboul Gheit also criticized Washington's decision to "keep the Arabs out of the picture" on Somalia, and again warned against references to Chapter VII in a UNSC mandate for Darfur.

12. (C) With Amre Moussa (just after hearing of a Hizballah attack on northern Israel and kidnappings of two Israeli soldiers), Welch and Abrams requested a clear statement from the League criticizing the attack and calling for the immediate return of the hostages, as well as Moussa's censure of Syrian complicity. Moussa sought clarity on the attacks before committing, but blamed Tel Aviv for the current regional crisis. Moussa, who had recently met with Khaled Misha'al in Damascus and just returned from a meeting of Iraq's neighbors in Tehran, called for "getting back to basics" on the regional peace process. The current "vicious circle" won't be broken by additional violence, he warned. With a group of six Egyptian civil society activists, Welch and Abrams heard recommendations on how the U.S. could best support reformers without tarring them in Egyptian public opinion or having U.S. criticism become the main issue. The group urged the USG to support democratic "principles" and not to get pulled into debates over specific cases. End summary.

Foreign Minister Aboul Gheit

13. (C) The meeting between A/S Welch, Abrams, the Ambassador, and Aboul Gheit took place just before the Hizballah attack on northern Israel and the kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers. Aboul Gheit said Egypt is concerned with the humanitarian impact of the Israeli incursion into Gaza, the need to target Hamas rather than the general population, and the opening of the Rafah border crossing. He characterized the situation at the Egyptian border with Gaza as desperate and claimed there were "no more than 800" Palestinians stranded there (UN reps claim the number is in the thousands within the wider border region). A/S Welch noted USG concerns over the border crossings situation, and said he and Abrams would discuss the situation in Israel and Ramallah with Israeli and Palestinian leaders. The U.S., he said, would soon announce a USD 50 million donation to UNRWA for humanitarian needs.

14. (C) Turning to Qatar's draft UN Security Council resolution on the Gaza situation, Welch requested Egypt to press the Arab Group in NY to stand down on the unhelpful and unbalanced text. Aboul Gheit said Egypt and other Arab regimes had to be seen as "doing something" to respond to Israeli transgressions toward Palestinian civilians. Welch asked for Egypt's advice on dealing with Syria on the ongoing Gaza crisis. Aboul Gheit recommended multiple-channel pressure on Damascus, and noted recent diplomatic efforts by the Turks and Saudis. Aboul Gheit pointed out that the Turks had credibility and influence in Damascus, but had been "manouvered" by the Syrians into allowing Hamas to demand "international guarantees" for protection if it releases the Israeli soldier in Gaza -- a direct snub at Egyptian mediation efforts. Similarly, the Saudi King was pressing his idea of bringing Arab foreign ministers together, with Hamas and Fatah leaders, to help them iron out a political compromise to move beyond their current stale-mate. Aboul Gheit suggested Israel "forget for a while" its kidnapped soldier in Gaza, in order to lessen tensions and diminish Hamas influence."

15. (C) Responding to a question on his Tehran visit with foreign ministers of Iraq and its neighbors, Aboul Gheit said he was pleased that the discussion was limited only to Iraq, and that Tehran was not permitted to use the "Iraq card" in its ongoing negotiations with the P-5/Germany on nuclear issues. Aboul Gheit said the U.S. "did not play" in the debate over whether or not to permit Tehran to host the meeting. Welch noted the difficulty in preventing the Tehran venue, once the Iraqi government indicated its decision to attend. Asked about Egypt's willingness to support the Iraqi government, Aboul Gheit said that he and Omar Soliman were devising an engagement strategy, "short of sending an envoy" to Baghdad. The murder of Egypt's Charge in Baghdad in June of 2005, he said, almost led to his resignation -- a situation he will not repeat. Pointing to the present security situation in Iraq, Aboul Gheit said that Egypt could not put itself under U.S. protection within the Green Zone. Aboul Gheit also eschewed the possibility of allowing the Iraqi expat community in Egypt to play a stronger, more visible political role, due to the potential for inter-Iraqi violence spreading to Egypt.

16. (C) In a brief discussion of Egyptian behavior in multilateral fora, Aboul Gheit said that it was important for Egypt to show its independence and ability to speak its mind in international fora. This approach enabled Egypt to balance Iranian influence. "We cannot allow Iran to emerge as the region's leader," he said.

17. (C) On Sudan and Somalia, Aboul Gheit chastised Washington for "seeking to keep the Arabs out of the picture" by excluding Egypt, Yemen, and Djibouti from the Somalia Contact Group. After revealing a "weak position in Somalia,"

he stated, the U.S. would benefit by working with moderate Arab states who have the necessary experience, influence, and interests there. On Sudan he warned against references to Chapter VII in a Darfur UNSC resolution, citing GOS opposition, and saying Egypt could not participate in a Darfur PKO under a Chapter VII mandate.

Arab League Secretary General Moussa

18. (C) Welch and DNSA Abrams' July 12 meeting with Arab League Secretary General Amre Moussa focused on the breaking events surrounding the Hizballah attack on IDF positions along the Lebanon-Israel border, and the capture of two IDF soldiers. Moussa said he planned to call Lebanese FM Siniora to inquire about the events, but said he would neither reach out to Damascus nor would the Arab League make a statement until he knew all the facts surrounding the attack. Moussa agreed that the hostage-taking was a serious escalation, but cautioned the U.S. not to draw immediate conclusions about Syrian complicity in the attack.

19. (C) Welch informed Moussa of details related to a July 12 morning attack by Hizballah on Israeli forces along the western part of the Lebanon border, including 7 casualties and 2 Israeli hostages. A visibly disturbed Moussa acknowledged the seriousness of the developments, citing the need to control escalation and to secure the release of the soldiers. Welch and DNSA Abrams pressed Moussa on what the AL would say and do about the attacks. Moussa said he would contact Lebanese PM Siniora, and the AL would consider coming out "energetically" against the Hizbollah action. Welch stressed that if Hizbollah -- a member of the Lebanese government -- was responsible for the attacks, the action could legitimately be viewed as a government-to-government action, essentially an act of war.

110. (C) Turning to Syria, Moussa said he did not think there was a Damascus link -- hoped not, he added -- to the July 12 attacks, and again cautioned the U.S. against drawing conclusions on Syrian complicity. Welch emphasized that Damascus bears responsibility due to its complicity in the continual re-supply of Hizballah from Iran that in turn destabilized the region. Welch strongly urged the AL to discuss with the Syrians the seriousness of not only these developments, but also of its negative role in Gaza and Iraq.

111. (C) Moussa said he viewed the "chaos" in Gaza as a repercussion of the "wrong approaches" taken by Israel and the U.S. following Hamas' parliamentary victory. Moussa said there was a possibility to give Hamas a chance to change its policies, but it was "pushed into a corner from the first minute" which "created chaos." Moussa said the AL had been pressing Hamas to "be responsible," and added that it was headed in that direction slowly-but-steadily, but Israeli acts and U.S. pressure had "closed doors." Abrams pushed back, asking what the Arab states had done to stop Qassam rocket attacks from Gaza into Israel following the September pull-out from Gaza. These attacks, he argued, undermined Israeli confidence in a peaceful approach to the situation.

112. (C) Moussa said the internal chaos within the PA is unacceptable, but "all is not totally lost" if the U.S. worked with PM Olmert on a common approach that would show some benefit to the Palestinians. Moussa added that this "vicious circle" of attack and reprisal cannot be broken by Israeli force alone. Moussa said he met with Mesha'al "for two hours" recently in Damascus. He said it was a useful meeting as Mesha'al explained the situation from a Hamas perspective, conveying the sense of frustration and distrust among the Palestinian people toward Israel. Moussa said the logic of Mesha'al and Hamas was strong, and was met with widespread sympathy in the region and beyond. Mesha'al had described Turkish and Egyptian interventions for the release of the Israeli soldier in Gaza, claiming that unfulfilled Israeli promises of prisoner releases sowed doubt on any similar offers now. Mesha'al reportedly said that prisoner releases by PM Sharon consisted only of those already on the verge of release, drug dealers, and common criminals, thereby shaking his faith in future releases.

Civil Society Roundtable

113. (C) During a July 12 roundtable discussion at the Ambassador's residence with a group of Egyptian civil society representatives, discussion centered on frustration with both the process and substance of GOE-backed reforms to date, and questioning of ruling National Democratic Party "reformers'" capabilities of implementing their proposed agenda. The attendees were generally disappointed by recently-passed press and judiciary laws, and warned of impending "crisis" should the GOE demonstrate a similar disregard for the consultative process when the upcoming constitutional amendments package and Anti-Terror Law come before

Parliament. Participants urged the USG not to send "mixed messages" regarding democratization in Egypt, and offered differing suggestions for how the U.S. might best encourage reform over the coming months, ranging from a request that the U.S. provide "unwavering public support" through "focused criticism of Egypt's human rights record and and slow pace of democratization," to urging the USG to call on the GOE to have "a dialogue with its own people." One attendee noted that since national elections will not be held for several years, the USG would be most effective be encouraging the building of an "infrastructure of democracy," through liberalization of the political party registration process, increased flexibility for the judiciary and press, and a more consultative process as the Anti-Terror Law and new constitutional amendments move forward.

14. (U) NEA Assistant Secretary Welch and DNSA Abrams did not have an opportunity to review this message before departing post.

JONES